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Civilian Deployment and Strategic Landpower

Improving the capabilities of the Joint Force

Civilians have historically deployed in support of operations during periods of conflict. The experiences during the counterinsurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown a clear need for skills and expertise in human terrain that reside in the private sector. As the Strategic Landpower concept will see the need for such expertise at work during the early phases of operations, the deployment process of government civilians needs to evolve to streamline to make it more efficient and effective in supporting Strategic Landpower. TRADOC's experience with the deployment of the civilians of the Human Terrain System is instructive.



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Deploying government civilians to support overseas conflicts has become a common and necessary practice, as civilian support of the Army and the joint force is a critical enabler of Strategic Landpower. TRADOC's experience with the Human Terrain System (HTS) exposed substantial limitations in the way that the Army and the Department of Defense (DOD) acquires, deploys, and sustains civilian employees in a theater of operations. These limitations prevented HTS from effectively supporting operations in Afghanistan and Iraq during the early years of the wars, and required significant efforts to resolve. Since making corrective measures, the HTS civilian deployment model has proven itself extremely capable. To enable better civilian support of Strategic Landpower, DOD must take advantage of these lessons learned in order to make existing civilian deployment capabilities smarter, more efficient, and more agile.

One of the lessons U.S. forces learned in Afghanistan and Iraq was that cultural knowledge and understanding were crucial to successfully fighting the counterinsurgencies in both countries. Army and Marine units conducted successful tactical operations without due regard for social and cultural factors, which led to negative operational effects and tactical backlash. Recognizing this knowledge gap, TRADOC, in concert with the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization (JIEDDO), developed the concept of fielding Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) to provide social science experience to tactical and operational units on a large scale. Social scientists from the academic world would provide units with a social framework for the local area and provide advice and recommendations to commanders and staffs. These HTTs would also reach back to subject matter experts in the United States.

This formed the basis of the Human Terrain System and has paid dividends during the later portions of these conflicts.

Civilian Deployment Process

Currently, DOD civilians lack a comprehensive deployment support system. No program provides full lifecycle assistance to organizations that deploy DOD civilians for overseas contingency operations. As a result, most civilians do not receive support from the sending organization, and rarely do receiving units provide adequate support. The outgrowth of this problem is that deployed DOD civilians face human resource issues, financial support problems, and poor oversight throughout the deployment. These personnel issues and lack of leadership result in reduced organizational effectiveness and low morale. TRADOC experienced all of these failures during the HTS program's early years, and their cumulative impact was significant. HTS endured years of investigations, bad publicity, and severely degraded employee performance.

Establishing a program with the sole responsibility to recruit, train, deploy, and sustain DOD civilians in deployed environments would resolve many of the issues. Such a program would create a system that would enable the rapid deployment of DOD civilians in support of operations. Centralization would clearly delineate support requirements and responsibilities, resulting in more effective DOD civilian support and allowing receiving units to focus on their operational missions. Moreover, centralized administration of these functions would achieve efficiencies through scale and would ensure consistency of treatment for all deployed civilians.

The centralized DOD civilian deployment system would encompass the entire deployment process, from the time civilian personnel receive notification of deployment to their final redeployment home. For this to become a reality, a cultural change within DOD is important. Perceptions of deployment tend to focus on uniformed military personnel boarding planes and conducting operations. This scope must expand to consider the federal civilians that also accompany uniformed servicemembers, who also work to achieve the strategic objectives of the nation. The lack of consideration for deployed civilians limits their ability to be effective. Individual DOD civilians, who often have prior military service, may be able to fumble their way through the existing deployment system at a great cost of time and effort, but such a system will be unsustainable as it faces increasing operational challenges.

The Civilian Role in Strategic Landpower

Many of the skills and competencies necessary for the successful application of Strategic Landpower are not adequately represented in the uniformed military. Cultural expertise like the HTS program provided, anthropology, and small business experience are only a few of the wide range of talents the Army may utilize within the concept of Strategic Landpower. Our experience in Afghanistan and Iraq bears out the need for such skills, which the uniformed military simply cannot provide.

These talents will rely on large numbers of civilians, many of whom will lack any familiarity with military bureaucratic methods. If HTS is any guide, those individuals will, in many cases, find it very difficult to adapt to military environments and processes, making them less effective and hindering their receiving organizations.

Putting the onus of support on individual programs is not only wasteful; it makes total program failure much more likely. A centralized solution solves this problem.

To understand why this is critical, it is important to recognize that HTS faced substantial difficulties as it struggled to resolve these issues. For years, HTS struggled with the challenge of building a \$100 million program that could adequately serve a workforce comprised almost entirely of civilians supporting contingency operations. That experience showcased the fundamental flaws of the “do it yourself” approach to deploying and sustaining civilians. With a centralized system in place, civilian expertise that does not exist in uniform can be rapidly deployed to support operations in their initial phases, when their impact may be most effective. HTS’s initial performance record was mixed and did not provide the needed operational advantage, tarnishing its reputation.

Deployment Integration with Hiring

By centralizing these deployment and support functions, DOD could move toward a modular approach. Programs with the need and the funding to deploy civilians would simply “plug in” to this centralized civilian deployment program. The program would ensure that civilian employees are prepared for deployments by managing the entire deployment process, integrating programs with deployment centers and receiving units, accounting for and supporting them in theater, and ensuring a smooth redeployment home. The program would take care of deployed civilians and, at the same time, ensure that they went where needed and did the job DOD hired them for.

The centralized approach would allow all of DOD to utilize this program without needing to create individual deployment support infrastructures. This alone would foster efficiency and allow programs to focus on core tasks instead of administrative minutia. Beyond that, the program could provide additional benefits. Contract recruiters, who seek people in the private and non-profit sectors with needed expertise, could quickly screen and hire qualified personnel to be trained and sworn in as government civilian employees. Using government employees is preferable to using contractors in a number of cases, as their salaries are generally lower, they fall under similar rules to the uniformed military, and they can perform inherently governmental functions. Normal government hiring is slow, but due to its large need for personnel, HTS perfected a hybrid contractor/government hiring process, which combined much of what is good in private sector hiring while meeting the specific requirements of government hiring. Additionally, by using term limited appointments, these positions maintain managerial flexibility. The government is never obligated to employ an individual beyond the term end date. The centralized civilian deployment system would maintain visibility of civilians on these limited-term appointments until they redeployed and returned to the private sector.

In this time of budget uncertainty, cost effectiveness would be a major justification for this kind of program. Its centralized functions would eliminate duplication across DOD yet allow expansion during times of need. Once in place, the deployment system would be able to support the deployment of all government service civilians, whether deployed singly or as part of a large effort. Any future programs in future conflicts would quickly and easily gain access to an infrastructure to support their deploying civilian workforce. Additionally, as responsible

stewards of the government's money, the centralized deployment program could ensure better control over pay and allowances, further cutting back on waste and fraud during deployments.

The Potential Solution

While DOD already has a program called the Civilian Expeditionary Workforce (CEW), this program is limited in scope. CEW primarily acts as a matchmaker, posting deployed jobs that interested parties can apply for. In addition to its current roles, CEW could potentially take on these additional deployment support functions, making it the "one stop shop" for deploying DOD civilian personnel. However, regardless of where the responsibility is placed, now is the time to act. With the looming end of mission in Afghanistan, DOD stands to lose a significant amount of institutional knowledge in the near future. A 2012 Government Accountability Office report entitled "Improvements Needed to Strengthen Management of U.S. Civilian Presence" pointed out how DOD had failed to learn from civilian deployment experiences in Bosnia, which directly led to problems in Iraq and Afghanistan several years later. We should not make the same mistake again.

Improving support to civilian employees is achievable and will pay large dividends, but only if senior leaders recognize the value in doing so. Since the role for civilians in Strategic Landpower is likely to only grow larger, DOD must prepare for the future and adopt a more intelligent approach.

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